

MAKING OR MARKETING A DIFFERENCE? AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE MARKETING OF FAIR TRADE COCOA FROM GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contrasts the representation of Third World farmers in Fair Trade marketing campaigns with data drawn from long-term fieldwork involving cocoa producers in Ghana and evidence provided by older anthropological monographs on these communities. In doing so, it practically illustrates the disparity between global assumptions and local perspectives on production and consumption. The key contention underlying this chapter is that the representation of producers as needy, helpless, and disgruntled with multinational corporations is deeply problematic. Such a representation reveals a significant and somewhat concerning discrepancy between the lives of farmers and the narratives displayed in Western campaigns for trade justice. By using fieldwork data

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and earlier anthropological literature showing the determination, ingenuity, and far-sighted strategies of cocoa farmers in Ghana, this chapter demonstrates that producers in the Third World are not the passive and helpless individuals they are sometimes portrayed as.

INTRODUCTION

The Fair Trade movement has achieved considerable success in recent years. Many sources describe its development in the closing decades of the twentieth century and the way it has gone from marginal to mainstream (Goodman, 2004; Nicholls & Opal, 2004; Oxford Policy Management, 2000). The success of Fair Trade extends beyond its sales figures, as it is also credited with having put pressure on mainstream manufacturers to be more ethical and to adopt more of a stakeholder approach in business transactions (Litvinoff & Madeley, 2007; Nicholls & Opal, 2004).

However, beneath the apparent success remain some fundamental questions and tensions, some of which have provided the impetus for this chapter. On a personal note, while I support Fair Trade and have done so for many years, contradictions arise when attempting to reconcile my field experience in Ghana with the promotional messages of Fair Trade organisations. The narratives of the farmers I met in Ghana are strikingly different to the narratives contained in some of the Fair Trade marketing literature. As a result, I share Wright's feelings of being "intrigued and sometimes troubled by [Fair Trade] marketing" (2004, p. 666). This chapter will detail this perceived divergence; firstly by discussing some of the key notions underpinning the marketing of Fair Trade before contrasting them with data gathered during anthropological fieldwork in Ghana. The discussion will then examine how the material fits older anthropological literature relating to cocoa farming and discuss issues such as the strategies used by farmers for optimising economic returns. This will provide a long-term perspective on the view that the farmers play an active role in shaping and negotiating their economic circumstances.

The chapter is based on two research projects. Firstly, it draws on a study examining the socio-economic impact of Fair Trade in a village in the Ashanti region of Ghana and the growth of the Fair Trade movement in the UK. The research included cocoa farmers who were members of the Fair Trade co-operative, Kuapa Kokoo, and cocoa farmers who were not. It was carried out in the summer of 2000 using anthropological research methods

such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews. In addition to this, the analysis draws on a more extended ethnography of a different cocoa-producing community in Ghana, which took place in a cluster of villages in Ashanti over a 15-month period from 2001 to 2003. The farmers who were involved in the research in both 2000 and 2001–2003 have been “followed up” by repeat visits since the initial research was carried out and a longitudinal perspective therefore underpins this analysis. Although the focus of the second project was child labour and education rather than Fair Trade, fieldwork on this subject required engaging with closely related issues, such as the way in which farmers produced and sold cocoa, and how they experienced the different channels of trade available to them. The community on which the research was based included cocoa farmers who were members of Kuapa Kokoo and farmers who were not. The primary research method, just as in the first research project, was participant observation although a range of other qualitative research methods were also included, such as semi-structured interviews, and child-focused participatory research methods.

Many of the insights included here are derived from the observation of processes which are unquantifiable but valuable in gaining a comprehensive picture of a particular cultural context (such as household decision-making, which involved many parties to varying degrees at different times). Qualitative long-term research methods are well-suited to research on Fair Trade as many of its benefits, such as increased producer self-esteem and female empowerment, are notoriously difficult to measure or quantify (Nicholls & Opal, 2004, p. 204). Through the process of participant observation, farmers were able to share ideas and experiences freely and on their terms. This resulted in discussions on issues such as the role of government, pesticide application, or the state of roads (included in later sections of this article), which I had not anticipated prior to commencing the research. These issues are far removed from the “typical” Fair Trade marketing narratives discussed below and they also affect farmers who are not members of Kuapa Kokoo but because they are clearly central in the farmers’ lives they have been included in the present discussion.

THE MARKETING OF FAIR TRADE

The academic literature on Fair Trade that has emerged in recent years has begun to question some of its marketing (Goodman, 2004; Wright, 2004) and underlying assumptions. New’s (2004) discussion of ethical supply

chains attributes the incoherence of debates regarding business ethics to the oversimplification involved in common understandings of market processes. Regarding who has responsibility for making a supply chain ethical, New rightly demonstrates the complexity of the issues involved and casts doubts on the assumptions (which are inherent in many activist campaigns) that firms (and by extension consumers) are responsible for the producers' actions. In the case of Fair Trade cocoa from Ghana, the marketing not only implies that buyers are responsible for the producers' actions, but for their entire lives, their happiness or hardship, their children's health and also education. This is illustrated in the following Oxfam quote:

We rely on the money we get from cocoa for everything: for food, clothes, medicines and school fees. ... Kuapa Kokoo [the Fair Trade co-operative] pays all its farmers a fair price for their crop, in cash, and on time. I am very happy: since I joined Fair Trade I can afford to send my children to school. (Oxfam, 2003, quoted in Goodman, 2004, p. 900)

Many sources advertising Fair Trade cocoa from Ghana show farmers being "saved" by Fair Trade, expressing gratitude to the Western consumer and pleading for continued support. The Oxfam Make Trade Fair website and describes how:

Women and children (...) used to walk for miles to fetch water from river and waterholes, which were also used by animals. Disease caused by dirty water was common, and many children missed out on school because they had to spend so much time collecting water. Now, thanks to wells that have been built with money from the Fair Trade premium, people have safe, clean water right at the heart of their village.¹

On the Co-operative website a farmer recounts that:

After losing my husband I had many worries. I had to struggle to feed my children and pay for their education. Before I joined Kuapa Kokoo and Fairtrade nobody cared for us. I now have money to send my children to school and to buy clothes (...) I hope for a good future.²

Another farmer had the following message for UK consumers: "Thank you to all you in the UK who buy chocolate from Kuapa Kokoo beans. Now I can look after my grandchildren. Please buy more and God Bless You!" (*ibid.*).

These testimonies illustrate that cocoa has been repositioned through marketing to meet the increasing demand from consumers for goods which connect them to communities across the globe. This shift towards a more explicit morality of consumption is also reflected in the case of other tropical commodities such as coffee (Roseberry, 1996; Wright, 2004), fresh vegetables (Dolan, 2005) and shea butter (Chalfin, 2004). Furthermore, the

narratives of poverty and gratitude from Ghana typify broader tendencies within consumption and ethical trade. This marketing relies to a large extent on what Wright describes in relation to newspaper advertisements for Cafédirect coffee as a “‘once upon a time’ narrative of arduousness and inequality that becomes a ‘happy ever after’ once consumers commit to fair trade” (2004, p. 671). More broadly, Dolan argues that “images of impoverished African workers are commodified by supermarkets and NGOs to peddle ethically produced wares” (2005, p. 370), a tendency which was illustrated by the Co-operative supermarket during Fair Trade fortnight in 2007. Promotional cards showing the Fair Trade logo and a picture of an unhappy-looking African child sitting in front of an almost empty bowl were displayed in each aisle. The caption accompanying the picture read “YOU CHOOSE...because he has no choice” (capitals in original).

Presenting Fair Trade as “a modern-day market-based ‘Robin Hood’” (Goodman, 2004, p. 897) and the use of such images in marketing is problematic. Dolan (2005, p. 369) argues that the images and narratives, which present Africa as destitute and desperate for Western-led redemption through ethical trade, are modern counterparts to the early traveller accounts, colonial discourses, and imperialist propaganda showing Africa as steeped in backwardness and needing imperial salvation. Such an ideology is clearly at odds with the explicit goal of Fair Trade to bring about parity between the developed and developing world and misconceptualises agency in the supply chain. At present, much of the marketing of Fair Trade attributes agency to the Western consumer and emotion (in the form of desperation or gratefulness) to the Third World producer. By contending that these narratives of transformation and gratitude appeal to the emotions of consumers, rather than reflect those of the producers, and that the nexus of agency and control is not solely in Western hands, this chapter argues for a reconfiguration of these ideas.

Given the obvious economic disparities between Ghana and the UK, the “givers and recipients” balance of power, which is evident in the marketing of cocoa, may seem inevitable. However, this is not the case. Divine chocolate bar wrappers, now richly adorned with the traditional Ghanaian *Adinkra* symbols, present an alternative view. The inside of the wrapper details the history of how Divine chocolate was set up, giving equal weight to the achievements of the farmers (whose initiative it was to set up the co-operative) and to their Western partners. Although the marketing of Divine chocolate has implied aid rather than trade in the past (Berlan, 2001), the promotional messages shown on chocolate bars, and contained in leaflets and magazine advertisements (which unfortunately cannot all be discussed

in the scope of the present article) have considerably evolved in recent years, and they now convey a sense of partnership and mutual benefit to a much greater extent. This likely reflects how the relationship between the farmer co-operative Kuapa Kokoo and UK partners has consolidated over time and the fact that the farmers now own a significant percentage of Divine.³ Irrespective of these factors, the case of Divine practically illustrates that Fair Trade marketing, which does not involve pleading or grateful farmers is possible.

Interestingly, there is now a greater openness about the idea that Fair Trade advertisements are not meant to be taken literally. One of my local supermarkets currently displays a large poster advertisement for Fair Trade bearing a farmer carrying a large bunch of bananas. The small print beneath the photograph reads: "Photography is representational and may not depict or relate to the actual Fairtrade farms or farmers who supplied this product. This photograph has been supplied courtesy of the Fairtrade Foundation." Whereas no one would assume that the characters in mainstream advertising, be it a happy family whose life has been "transformed" by a particular brand of washing powder or the purchase of a particular car, were *real* people, consumers expect that Fair Trade advertisements literally capture the lives of individuals. This results from consumers' pre-existing expectations of Fair Trade⁴ and from the explicit emphasis in many campaigns on "meeting" and "knowing" the farmers (see Wright, 2004 and also Goodman, 2004). However, as previously argued, efforts to establish links between producers and consumers can distort understandings of the commodity chain (see New, 2004) and the following section will show that marketing is not necessarily representative of local perspectives.

FAIR TRADE IN PRACTICE

At the outset of this discussion, some of the basic features of the Fair Trade and non-Fair Trade sales channels for cocoa in Ghana must be outlined. A majority of cocoa in West Africa is grown on small-scale family-owned farms rather than on commercial plantations. Cocoa farmers in Ghana have the option of selling their cocoa to any of 20–25 different Licensed Buying Companies (one of which is Kuapa Kokoo), depending on which ones operate in their community. The Licensed Buying Companies (LBCs) sell the cocoa to Cocobod (the government-run Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board), which then sells and exports it to international markets.⁵ Unlike many other Fair Trade products, in the case of Ghanaian cocoa, irrespective

of whether farmers are members of Kuapa Kokoo or not, “the production process is virtually identical in all cases” (Larbi-Jones, 2001, p. 6). Indeed, Kuapa Kokoo has high labour standards and is keen to educate farmers on issues such as child labour (see Berlan, 2004) but even farmers who have no links with Kuapa Kokoo would in most cases satisfy these standards.⁶

In my study, receiving a higher price was never cited as a reason for being a member of Kuapa Kokoo. Ronchi describes farmers as having “a low awareness of Kuapa as the source of their cocoa pricing benefits” (2002, p. 36). Larbi-Jones’ study of Fair Trade in Ghana states “Payments and bonuses are not the primary incentive for farmers to sell to Kuapa (only one farmer mentioned them)” (2001, p. 64). When asked directly if there was any price difference between LBCs, “many categorically stated that there is no difference” (*ibid.*). The reasons given for this is that the difference is very small and that farmers do not sell their cocoa in full 65 kg bags but rather in smaller portions as soon as it is ready, thus making it less easy to compare LBC prices, which are for full 65 kg bags. Furthermore, low literacy levels compound the difficulty of comparing LBCs on the basis of price. A premium of \$150 is paid for every tonne of Fair Trade Ghanaian cocoa but this is not given directly to the farmers; it is invested in community projects such as water wells or palm oil projects. Therefore, farmers earn significantly more corporately but not individually. The small supplement, which individual farmers receive – and which most of them do not even realise – is as a result of the co-operative nature of Kuapa Kokoo and not the Fair Trade premium (Larbi-Jones, 2001).⁷ The fact that individual farmers selling to Kuapa Kokoo do not receive a significantly higher price is contrary to what some Fair Trade organisations assert (Berlan, 2001, 2004; Larbi-Jones, 2001; Ronchi, 2002). The small increment, which farmers receive, is certainly not enough to pay for healthcare and medical bills, as is often claimed. For example, the Oxfam website states:

When the government was buying her cocoa, Lucy was rarely paid on time. As a result, she was unable to pay her children’s school fees, and they went without an education. Now, through the Fair Trade bonus she gets from Kuapa Kokoo, she can send her children to school. (quoted in Nicholls & Opal, 2004, p. 17)

Such marketing does not intend to deceive consumers. A representative from one of the organisations making claims about farmers receiving bonuses enabling them to send their children to school (who did not wish to be identified) said in an interview “this [was] not the sort of advertising that [the organisation] should be aspiring to.” He attributed the discrepancies to

the fact that communication was not always effective between staff responsible for marketing and staff knowledgeable about local realities.

Due to the relatively low demand for Fair Trade cocoa in the West, only 3% of the cocoa produced by Kuapa Kokoo is bought by Fair Trade organisations,⁸ and 97% of their cocoa is bought by mainstream multinational companies (via the government intermediary Cocobod). As the number of communities who produce cocoa certified "fair" is so disproportionate to the volume of Fair Trade sales, the premium generated by these sales simply cannot fund projects in all the communities involved.⁹ As a result, there are many communities that have not yet received any practical benefits such as water wells as a result of Fair Trade, even though their farmers produce Fair Trade cocoa. This is not due to a failure on the part of the co-operative or the farmers but to an insufficient demand for Fair Trade cocoa in the West. It is ironic that in order for all Kuapa Kokoo farmers to reap the full financial benefits of Fair Trade, their cocoa would have to be bought on these terms by large-scale multinationals and thus lose its "special" status as an ethical alternative to mainstream chocolate manufacturers. Furthermore, Kuapa Kokoo has not only worked with Fair Trade companies but also collaborated with mainstream companies to help communities. For example, between 2000 and 2006, 375 water wells were funded by Cadbury Schweppes working in collaboration with WaterAid and Kuapa Kokoo, and this provides clean water to an estimated 50,000 people.¹⁰ Opinions are divided as to how much of an achievement this constitutes. Some Fair Trade campaigners argue that such interventions cannot be taken seriously as they are disproportionate to the profits of mainstream chocolate companies. However, when asked about this, a representative from the chocolate industry pointed out that the number of water wells funded by multinational companies had in some years exceeded the number funded by Fair Trade organisations, once more suggesting that the impact of Fair Trade depends on its absorption into mainstream channels.

The data presented here may appear much more complex than one might expect. This is because Fair Trade *is* more complex than one is led to believe by marketing and awareness campaigns;¹¹ it is not simply a matter of "consumer pays more; producers get more." In addition to Fair Trade being more complicated in practise, in many ways it may appear less morally satisfying to the consumer, as individual Fair Trade cocoa farmers do not receive a significantly higher income and many of them have not yet received a community benefit from the cocoa sales. So why buy Fair Trade? Is it worth it? In order to answer this question, some foundational explanations

must once more be provided. Larbi-Jones (2001) argued that the benefits enjoyed by farmers derive from Kuapa Kokoo's principles and its co-operative structure rather than from its sales to the West. Indeed, although there are many other LBCs and they also give farmers benefits (as will be explained below), Kuapa Kokoo is the only cocoa-buying organisation with farmer ownership and a democratic organisation. Individual villages have voluntary Kuapa societies, which elect regional representatives for the five main cocoa-producing regions (Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Western, Eastern, and Central). They all form part of the Farmers' Union (represented by a National Executive Council), which owns the trading company responsible for the onward sale of cocoa, as well as the Farmers' Trust Fund responsible for community development projects. Crucially, the Farmers' Union has a shareholding in the chocolate company Divine, which is significant as it is unique for a group of African farmers to own part of the company processing their produce.¹² In addition to this, Kuapa Kokoo is committed to gender equality and funds many projects, such as palm oil projects or soap-making facilities, in order to supplement the incomes of women members. The commitment to gender equality is also reflected in the running of the village societies, and in at least one of the villages I visited, the president of the village society was a woman. However, one of the most frequently cited benefits of Kuapa Kokoo was their provision of loans to help maintain or develop the farm. When talking to one farmer about co-operatives he said that he did not trust any co-operative other than Kuapa Kokoo as "They begin well but they become corrupt." He did, however, believe that Kuapa was different from other co-operatives and said he had become a member because they gave farmers loans to help with farm maintenance.

From the perspective of the Western consumer, the question of whether Fair Trade is ultimately "worth it" is one which only the consumer can determine, and which may require a change of perspective rather than simply more information. Fair Trade may not achieve the things a Western consumer may wish for, such as a much higher income or schools in every village. However, empowerment is not simply about income. The provision of loans, gender equality, and participatory democracy are working successfully and they matter considerably to the local communities, as reflected in the substantial growth of Kuapa Kokoo in recent years. This is in keeping with Ronchi's claim that cocoa producers are "as concerned with the strengthening of their communities and the organisations which represent them" (2002, p. 10) as with receiving a greater income, adding that the overemphasis on income "leads to a narrow view of the impacts of

Fairtrade and may overlook much of the Southern organisations' valuable work" (*ibid.*). They also substantiate Larbi-Jones' contention that "issues of trust, participation [and] control (...) are central to the farmer's evaluation of fairness in trade" (2001, p. 72). Therefore, it seems clear that Kuapa Kokoo is benefiting farmers, although not necessarily in ways that consumers may expect or wish for.

FAIR TRADE: VIEWS FROM THE VILLAGE

During my fieldwork in Ghana, I never heard testimonies of the sort described above, even though many farmers were members of Kuapa Kokoo and we frequently talked about growing and selling cocoa. Had I asked the farmers if they enjoyed having a clean water supply, explained that it had been made possible by the purchasing actions of ethical Western consumers, and pressed my informants for a response, I might have obtained similar testimonies. However, as previously outlined, my research methods deliberately avoided "guiding" farmers in such a manner. Furthermore, I think such a conversation might have elicited some blank looks and confusion for a number of reasons. Kuapa Kokoo is the only Ghanaian cocoa-buying company, which is a co-operative operating along Fair Trade principles. However, it is not the only company that offers benefits to farmers and the other LBCs for cocoa also frequently reward farmers. Their rewards include farm improvement schemes, free pesticide and pesticide application, agricultural training, cash bonuses, scholarships for farmers' children, radios, bicycles, protective farming gear, farming equipment, high-quality cloth, and many other things which are greatly valued by rural communities.¹³ If I had told the farmers that their water well was due to ethical trade, they would likely have questioned how I could assert that other companies, who also offer incentives, were acting "unethically." Although Kuapa Kokoo's practical benefits are valuable, the co-operative is extending a well-established tradition, rather than breaking new ground, by giving farmers rewards. As a result, grateful farmer testimonies could also probably be gathered by other LBCs and narratives that imply the uniqueness of Fair Trade benefits must be placed in the broader context of local trading relations.

When I asked farmers why they sold their cocoa to a particular LBC, the reasons given were varied. Some sold to a certain company because they had done so for many years and were satisfied with this arrangement. Others said that they were related to someone in an LBC and therefore sold to

them. One farmer cited a close relative working for Kuapa Kokoo as the reason for selling to them. When I asked if there were any other reasons for selling to Kuapa Kokoo he said no. Some farmers had been cheated by a particular LBC in the past and this influenced their choice; others cited reasons of payment, credit access, the provision of farming equipment or the fact that they were employed in some capacity by one of the LBCs (e.g. to weigh cocoa). Many of them sold to different companies, depending on the proximity of the LBCs' buying stations who had given them credit or who they had had a good experience with in the last cocoa season.

Although some patterns emerge according to reasons cited above (such as the provision of loans), no two-farmer narratives are the same, and their reasons for selling to particular LBCs can vary considerably. This does *not* mean that Kuapa Kokoo is not a good organisation. It means that Fair Trade is more than the sum of its narratives and that the judgement of its efficacy must not be based on them. Given the amount of competition from other LBCs, if Kuapa Kokoo was not an effective farmer organisation, it would have collapsed long ago. Instead, since it was set up in 1993, it has become the fastest growing farmer organisation in Ghana, reaching 45,000 members in approximately 1,300 village societies,¹⁴ and it remains the only LBC operating on co-operative principles. The experiences of women in the co-operative, the loyalty of farmers towards Kuapa, its growth and the high retention rates of its members (especially given that farmers have a degree of choice regarding LBCs and are often cynical about them) are far more effective markers of the achievements of Kuapa than enthusiastic but confusing marketing narratives making claims about increased incomes and a sudden ability to pay for healthcare or education.

One of the cocoa farmers, who was a member of the Kuapa Kokoo co-operative and who was employed to record the cocoa purchases at village-level, told me that he had been visited by people from London, who had explained the supply chain to him and given him giant cardboard bars of chocolate. These were to help him educate other farmers about how the cocoa they grow is used in the UK. He had since lost the cardboard bars of chocolate and apparently forgotten many of the explanations he had received about the supply chain. He did, however, stress that he knew Kuapa Kokoo offered a better deal than other cocoa companies. He did not appear to be actively disseminating this message, although he may have been more active in the period immediately after the visit from London. Neither he nor the other farmers ever appeared to be concerned about the upward uses of the cocoa in any way, except in as much as they were concerned to maintain its high quality. Precisely because the farmers work extremely hard

to produce premium cocoa, the narratives of gratitude appear surprising. If trade is an exchange satisfying mutual needs (according to Aristotle's definition of the "domestic economy") and the Ghanaians have more than adequately fulfilled their side of the bargain by producing premium quality cocoa, why would they also be grateful? Imagine a UK farmer who works hard to produce a particular crop. Would he or she be grateful for its purchase or would they expect this as the logical outcome of their hard work? Would they see the consumer as their saviour, or simply be concerned to continue to work hard in order to remain competitive in a particular supply chain?

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COCOA AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The testimonies of gratitude quoted regarding the marketing of Fair Trade above are in many ways at odds with some of the attitudes of the farmers, which are linked with the way they perceive the government. As was previously explained, sales of cocoa (even if Fair Trade) have to go through a chain of key intermediaries including the LBCs and Cocobod (which is government-run). Farmers do not sell directly to Western companies and it is the Ghanaian government – not the Western companies – which sets the price individual farmers receive for their cocoa (see Berlan, 2004, pp. 160–161). In addition to this, the government carries out the vitally important spraying of the cocoa crops with fungicides and pesticides and provides basic infrastructure such as roads. As the Ghanaian government mediates sales, sets prices, provides spraying, and other vitally important services, the farmers quite reasonably see themselves as being in the hands of the government, rather than in those of multinationals or of the Western consumer. Therefore, a conversation of the sort described above which attributes the agency for positive change in Western hands would be difficult for the farmers to conceptualise given the fact that in so many ways, it is the government which most directly determines their fortune or hardship.

When discussing trade-related issues and Western consumption, the farmers' main concern was to produce high-quality cocoa so that it would generate a substantial revenue and Ghana could prosper. As a result, they were anxious to protect cocoa crops from insects and other pests, diseases and bush fires, and they were infuriated by the poor state of many rural roads, the quality of which affected farmers' ability to sell their crops by limiting or facilitating travel. These issues came up immeasurably more often than any other in discussions of trade, and blame for their problems, if

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any was apportioned, was directed at the government, which they felt should be doing more to assist them, rather than at multinational corporations or Western consumers. Tensions between cocoa farmers and the Ghanaian government have increased over time. As will be explained below, changes to the structure of the cocoa industry brought in by the colonial government in the 1940s resulted in increased farmer protests and this consolidated a shift in the farmers' antagonism away from firms towards the government, which continued even after independence (Beckman, 1976).

In the cocoa village where I first carried out research in 2000 and in the main village where I was based until 2003, I have witnessed many improvements over the course of the last few years. This has included a new school, a much-improved road, better housing, water wells, and the laying of infrastructure for electricity. These have been largely funded by local and national government (although this may have been as a result of foreign aid) and made possible by the initiatives and determined efforts of the local communities, who have campaigned for better facilities, provided cash, time, labour, and materials (such as timber and roofing sheets) for communal projects, and shown great commitment to democracy, education, and socio-economic development in numerous ways. There have also been benefits as a direct result of Fair Trade for some communities, and these are of course important, but they are not as significant as the benefits brought about by democratisation, government policy and local resolve. Fair Trade is *not* a panacea; it is a positive thing but it is not the sole or most effective means of achieving socio-economic development.

PAYBACK TIME: HOW FARMERS GET EVEN BY NOT PAYING BACK

Reports of abuse and exploitation in the cocoa industry abounded in the UK during my fieldwork in Ghana. For example, the Co-operative report *Chocolate: A Campaign for Fairtrade Chocolate and an End to Exploitation* (2002) quoted Linda Gilroy MP as stating "The cocoa growers in West Africa are amongst the most exploited in the world" (The Co-operative, 2002, p. 1). The report also stated "Where Fairtrade is not present, growers are often exploited and cheated by unscrupulous middle-men" (*ibid.*, p. 3). Even the *Daily Mirror*, not usually associated with trade justice, made the following claim: "Certain big-name chocolate companies have been known to cheat [the farmers] by 'fixing' the scales which weigh the bags of beans" (Foster, 2002). Given the fact that multinationals do not buy directly from

farmers, as explained in the previous section, this is a puzzling claim. At any rate, having been made aware of these reports, I expected throughout my fieldwork to find evidence that farmers were routinely being cheated. As regards local cocoa buyers, there is clear evidence that cheating occurs. One of the farmers told me that he had tried to sell a bag of cocoa to a particular cocoa LBC and had been told that his bag did not contain the required 65 kilos of cocoa. He protested that he knew he was being cheated and refused to sell his cocoa on these terms. When Kuapa Kokoo weighed his bag they agreed it was the correct weight. This shows that farmers can be badly cheated and that this results in considerable frustration and anxiety. However, this example also shows that they have some bargaining power. Because there are many different LBCs the farmers have some degree of choice and are not cheated as a matter of course, as is often implied.

Much Fair Trade marketing literature about cocoa in Ghana states that Kuapa Kokoo is the only LBC which does not rig scales or cheat farmers in any way. While I have considerable faith in the co-operative, one should be cautious about making certain claims as two of their cocoa buyers were arrested in 2004 for cheating cocoa farmers by rigging the scales (Daily Graphic, 2004). The co-operative is clearly committed to eradicating such abuse but, like any other organisation, it cannot offer absolute guarantees that every one of its staff will act with integrity at all times. Again, Fair Trade should not be conceived of or marketed as a miracle cure; it aims to improve working and living conditions for farmers but the practical implementation of this goal will take time and include setbacks. The promotion of Fair Trade as morally and practically blameless sets a dangerously high standard, which could easily be shattered by the necessary process of trial, error and improvement which it must necessarily undergo. As such, campaigners for trade justice may be well-advised to "tone down" some of their messages – or at least be more forthright about the possible disparities between aspiration and reality.

One of the unexpected findings of my fieldwork was that farmers cheated LBCs just as readily as LBCs cheated them. The relevance of this issue to this chapter is to illustrate that farmers are not the passive victims they are sometimes portrayed as in campaigns for trade justice. Indeed, many of them typified Hill's statement that "Farmers in the rural tropical world are commonly not the docile, subservient or 'angry' peasants portrayed in many textbooks and official publications" (1986, p. 1). To my knowledge, the only farmers' subversion which is well-acknowledged in academic literature (and which considerably antagonises their government) is the illegal practise of smuggling cocoa to the Ivory Coast in order to receive a higher price

(Baker, 2000; Bulir, 2002; Brydon, 1985; Gibbon, Havnevik, & Hermele, 1993; Mikell, 1989).¹⁵ In a more constructive way, the farmers' resilience and ingenuity is reflected in the fact that largely on their initiative that Kuapa Kokoo was initially set up. Prior to 1992, no LBCs existed and Cocobod was the only channel for buying cocoa. Following Structural Adjustment Programmes, the government was forced to relax its monopoly and allow for the existence of LBCs. A Cocobod employee, Nana Frimpong Abrebrese, saw this as an opportunity for the farmers to join forces and profit from their cocoa. Based on his idea, Kuapa Kokoo was set up in 1993 with assistance from Twin Trading.¹⁶ As both the smuggling of cocoa and the setting up of Kuapa Kokoo are well-documented in other sources, they will not be discussed further in this chapter. The practise of cheating LBCs, however, is much less known and provides an excellent illustration of the farmers' degree of agency, determination and ingenuity in shaping the trading relationships they enter into, as will now be shown.

Many farmers accept pre-payment from LBCs because they need loans to maintain or expand their farms and this enables them to avoid debt by helping their cash flow in-between harvests. These loans are given on the understanding that the farmers will sell their cocoa to the LBC, which has helped them. However, it is very common for farmers to "forget" this agreement and sell their cocoa to another company as soon as it has been harvested and dried. When the representatives of the LBC, which has provided the loan, come to purchase the cocoa, it has often already been sold and the recovery of funds is virtually impossible. This happens routinely at village-level but also on a bigger scale. For example, Cashpro, one of the Ghanaian LBCs, announced in September 2000 that it would release 27.7 billion Cedis in loans to cocoa farmers,¹⁷ and that it would provide them with pesticide, fungicide, fertilizer and spraying assistance to boost their yields (The Ghanaian Times, 2000, September 7, 11, & 18). This programme, known as the "Farmers' Hi-Tech Programme," aimed to help farmers maintain their farms and increase their productivity and "hence increase the farmers' income and improve upon their standards of living" (*ibid.*, September 18). The managing director of Cashpro said at the launch of the programme that his company was establishing a partnership with the farmers and reminded them of their obligation to sell their harvested cocoa to Cashpro in order to pay back their loans and also enable others to benefit (*ibid.*, September 7). The two banks, which provided the funds for this initiative, SSB Bank Limited and the Agricultural Development Bank, did so with the "guarantee" that the funds would be paid back by beneficiary farmers after harvesting their crops. The programme failed, largely (though

not exclusively) because the farmers took the loans but sold their cocoa elsewhere. Indeed, Cashpro made the following statement in Ghana's biggest selling daily, *Daily Graphic*, a few months later:

The company wishes to acknowledge that due to a combination of circumstances, Cashpro has indeed run into temporary but resolvable financial difficulties (...) Investment in the novelty Hi-tech Cocoa Project has especially proved unfortunate for the Company (...) Cashpro invested a lot of time, money and other resources to ensure that the company and its farmer-clients benefited from the scheme. Unfortunately, the farmers who were assisted under the project and who realised the anticipated increased yield, reneged on their undertakings in their agreement with Cashpro and instead sold their cocoa to other competing Licensed Buying Companies (LBCs). This reduced Cashpro's share in the industry and also made it difficult to recover the credit assistance extended to these farmers. Cashpro is currently in discussion with its bankers and has proposed measures to restructure the Company's debts and restore the Company to sound financial health.... (Daily Graphic, 2001, July 11)¹⁸

FARMER AGENCY AND RESISTANCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Cashpro's unfortunate experience with the Hi-Tech programme is not an isolated incident and there is much evidence in older anthropological literature that farmers are not passive and helpless victims of the cocoa trade. They are more ingenious and far-sighted than contemporary literature, especially in the area of Fair Trade, gives them credit for. This will be illustrated with reference to three particular examples: land purchasing arrangements; the protests of the 1940s; and the farmers' swindling of the colonial authorities out of millions of pounds.

Cocoa was introduced to Ghana in 1879. It was planted in the Southern forest belt of Ghana and rapidly drew a significant population of migrants from the North who saw how potentially lucrative the new crop was. Hill (1963) argues that it was migrant workers who built up the cocoa industry in the first half of the twentieth century. In order to maximise their bargaining power and economic potential, individual migrant farmers organised themselves into companies or kinship groups (depending on whether they were patrilineal or matrilineal) for the purpose of buying land in new areas. Hill describes these two distinct types of grouping as the "company system" and the "family land" system. The family land system was mainly developed by matrilineal groups and consisted of a certain number of kinsmen (male and female) coming together to acquire land under the leadership of a senior male. Although a block of land was the property of a group, farmers

farmed plots of land individually and the arrangements of these plots were not strictly set. This arrangement enabled farmers to enjoy the individual and corporate benefits of land ownership by letting them have freedom over their plots while also having group bargaining power through the joint ownership of the soil. It did not place any restrictions on a farmer's use of land (except not being free to sell it) and meant they were able to withstand the various upheavals and changes in the cocoa industry (Hill, 1963).

The other form of social organisation described by Hill is the "company" whereby a group of men from the same (normally patrilineal) community, but who were not necessarily kinsmen, came together to buy a block of land for cocoa farming. The allocation of land depended on the level of financial contribution made by individual members and land was allocated in strips from a common baseline. The underlying principle of this arrangement was fairness and equality, and farmers made every attempt to guarantee this by paying the proper price for portions of land, making careful measurements and preferring land that would be easy to divide up. Hill states: "If a company land is reasonably rectangular, then the area of a strip-farm is determined by its width and the farmers' great ambition of achieving 'fairness,' as between themselves, is achieved" (1963, p. 44). In this system, members of the company worked on the understanding that the land purchased was bought for individual farmers and that this arrangement was solely for the purpose of buying land and did not extend to anything else.

The relevance of these particular arrangements for the purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, by successfully balancing individual and corporate concerns, such arrangements provide a coherent group structure, which, regardless of whether it involves close kin, enables the farmer to benefit from increased bargaining power and security when buying land. Farmers retain individual freedom and economic gains but are also able to enjoy the advantages of being part of a corporate body. Kuapa Kokoo was founded on similar principles. It was set up to give farmers more bargaining power by joining forces to become a corporate unit while also retaining full autonomy over their individual farms. This further illustrates that the farmers are resourceful and that they have agency in determining their economic circumstances. Both in the case of buying land and of setting up Kuapa Kokoo, they have clearly been able to devise successful strategies for pre-empting adversity, increasing their bargaining power and mitigating risk on their own terms and on their own initiative. Secondly, in both cases, the concept of fairness and of farmers profiting equally is central. This shows that there is a well-developed and widely understood indigenous concept of fairness. Whereas many well-intentioned advocates of trade justice believe

that Fair Trade has benefited farmers by “educating” them about fairness or about how to obtain rights, it is clear such understandings existed already and the farmers were able to take steps to secure these without the need for foreign interference.

There is further evidence of the farmers’ agency and determination predating the examples cited above. The Great Slump of the 1930s caused such drastic falls in the world price for cocoa and economic hardship that farmers and traders decided to overcome their conflicting interests and organise collectively against the Europeans by withholding their cocoa from the market (Larbi-Jones, 2001, p. 15). By 1938, this had virtually brought trade to a standstill, so the British authorities were forced to take action to improve the Ghanaian cocoa trade. Fearing further “organised peasant resistance” (Berry, 1981, p. 25) and its destabilising effects, the colonial government introduced the Gold Coast Cocoa Marketing Board and a new cocoa price policy guaranteeing farmers a fixed price for their cocoa, irrespective of world market fluctuations. Although these changes were officially instituted to benefit the farmers, farmer resentment soon grew as it became obvious that although they were receiving a stable price, they were still being grossly underpaid. Indeed, post-war recovery and the higher world market price for cocoa meant that the Cocoa Board was making huge profits.¹⁹ As a result, the share of the world market price that the farmers received went down and farmer protests increased in the 1940s. Communities appointed farmers to represent them in dealings with the colonial government. In 1945, a delegation of cocoa farmers travelled to London to discuss the farmers’ grievances over poor shares of the world market price and lack of control over the profit of the cocoa trade. It is during this period that the farmers’ frustration with their economic predicament shifted away from commercial firms and became directed towards the government (Beckman, 1976), which, as previously shown, remains the case today.

Although the farmers did not obtain entirely satisfactory outcomes from the colonial government, these events illustrate that the farmers had been able to organise collectively, force the colonial government to respond and at least achieve pricing security. This was not their only victory over the authorities perceived to be oppressing them. Hill in *How the Farmers Outwitted the Bureaucrats: A True Tale* (1986, pp. 1–7; see also Beckman, 1976) described how the cocoa farmers, through their local farmers’ committee and the system of farm-pledging – which is unfortunately too complex to explain here – swindled the Gold Coast Cocoa Purchasing Company (CPC) out of almost three million pounds. To summarise the case, the CPC wished to use its assets to relieve the indebtedness of cocoa

farmers, which was widespread and had resulted in many of them pledging their farms to creditors as security for a loan. In actual fact, these creditors were often also cocoa farmers, as opposed to "proper" moneylenders, and were commonly friends with their debtors (Hill, 1986, p. 3). The parties involved saw the arrangement as mutually convenient rather than detrimental or exploitative. However, because the bureaucrats believed that "indebtedness was 'bad' and ought to be 'relieved'" (Hill, 1986, p. 2), it was decided that the debt would be transferred from the creditor to the CPC itself, which would notionally assume charge of the cocoa farm which had originally been pledged as security for the loan. Knowing that the CPC would not be able to investigate every request for debt relief, the farmers made false claims of indebtedness, which resulted in some of them obtaining as much as £1,500 from the CPC. In the words of the Jibowu Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the CPC, the Promissory Notes used to support the farmers' claim were apt to be "false, antedated and prepared purposely for obtaining CPC loans" (cited in Hill, 1986, p. 4). Just as the farmers did not repay loans to Cashpro detailed in Payback Time: How Farmers Get Even by Not Paying Back, the farmers "outwitted the bureaucrats by neglecting to repay the great bulk of the sum of nearly £3 million that had been granted (i.e., loaned) in this way before the scheme ended in 1956, as a result of the critical attitude of the Jibowu report" (*ibid.*).

Further evidence of the farmers' contempt towards the authorities can be found in Okali (1983, p. 17), where she describes how the farmers took the grants given by the government to replace trees affected by swollen-shoot disease and used them to set up new cocoa farms. The government, incensed at not having succeeded in getting the farmers to honour their pledge to use the money for replacing trees, was finally forced to undertake the task of replacing the trees itself at great cost.

The farmers have evidently been extremely good at turning various opportunities to their advantage and have had no qualms about cheating the authorities in order to achieve this. This is not to say that they do not have high standards of loyalty and fairness towards each other. Furthermore, while one cannot endorse their deceit of the colonial administration, there can be no doubt that they would have acted differently in a system which helped and supported them rather than routinely exploited them and made enormous profits at their expense. Contrary to the perceptions of farmers as needy and helpless, they exhibit an ingenious, far-sighted and entrepreneurial spirit. In particular, the capacity to unite as farmers who face the same predicament and have a common purpose, and the strategy of pooling assets

in order to form a more viable economic unit, has been a successful strategic response to change and opportunity both historically and in the present day. In this respect, it is easy to see how the Ghanaian cocoa farmer has been cited in the past as the classic example that man in Africa behaves rationally and can think just as strategically as the economic man of classical theory (Hill, 1970; Okali, 1983; Schneider, 1974).

CONCLUSION

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The present article does not intend to understate the poverty of the farmers, and *some* form of assistance to them is obviously necessary in order to remedy the endemic poverty in their communities. However, poverty does not necessarily equate to helplessness and dependency on Western partners, as is implied in much Fair Trade marketing. In Ghana, the farmers' agency and their handling of the structures and institutions that have a bearing on their lives (both now and historically) clearly illustrate that they do not rely on external aid. Presenting Africans as dependant illustrates a degree of paternalism, which has long been identified in ethical trade more broadly (Blowfield, 1999, p. 767) and which is at odds with the broader goal of Fair Trade to bring parity in trading relationships. While it is often thought that communities in the Third World struggle unequally against multinationals or global markets like David and Goliath, the truth is much more complex, and farmers are ill-served by the propagation of simplistic discourses emphasising neediness and poverty. Thus, while the onus in Fair Trade has traditionally been on Southern partners to evaluate themselves and be evaluated (Ronchi, 2002, p. 9), the gap between marketing and local experiences shows that there is also a need for Northern organisations to examine their practices. Marketing need not be unrepresentative in order to be persuasive, as Divine has shown. Furthermore, neither the impact nor the potential of Fair Trade should be overstated in its marketing, as this could result in a loss of consumer confidence if representations prove to exceed reality. On a more positive note, although Fair Trade obviously faces many challenges, these should not detract from the progress and successes that have been achieved in recent years. These are especially reflected in the way in which partnerships have developed and new avenues for development have been created. If the tensions identified in this chapter can be resolved, one can be optimistic that Fair Trade will continue to grow and achieve its goals.

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NOTES

1. See <http://www.maketrade4fair.com/en/index.php?file=28032002151049.htm> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

2. See <http://www.co-operativemembership.coop/en/food/fairtrade/ourfairtrade/products/chocolate/producers/kuapakokoogrowers/> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

3. Since the Body Shop donated their shares in Divine to the farmers in 2006 the co-operative owns nearly half the company. See <http://www.divinechocolate.com/about/kokoo.aspx> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

4. Dolan (2005) provides a fascinating discussion of the way in which contemporary ideas about ethical trade and consumption are rooted in a historical legacy of considerations of morality and progress in which the African worker is an object of duty and obligation.

5. The scope of this chapter does not allow for a comprehensive overview of cocoa growing and export procedures. For more detailed explanations on the cocoa market, see Baker (2000, pp. 117–149), Chalfin (2004), and Berlan (2004, 2005).

6. There have been many reports of labour abuses on cocoa farms in Cote d'Ivoire, and in West Africa more broadly, in recent years. Based on long-term fieldwork, my research suggests that labour conditions on cocoa farms in Ghana are very good overall, and that much of the criticism directed at the farmers, especially as regards child labour, was unrepresentative of local practices (Berlan, 2004, 2005).

7. Farmers sometimes receive bonuses but this is not exclusive to Kuapa Kokoo and Kuapa Kokoo bonuses are partly funded by their profits through conventional trade (see Ronchi, 2002, p. 36).

8. See: <http://www.divinechocolate.com/about/resources/facts-figures.aspx> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

9. Receiving funding from the Fair Trade premium for community projects requires a village-based Kuapa Kokoo society committee to make an application to the national Kuapa Kokoo Trust Fund for community development projects (which is run by elected members of the co-operative). It requires a village society to meet certain eligibility criteria and to demonstrate the ability to execute the project satisfactorily (e.g., by showing that there is enough local support for it, that the community can provide labour and other resources if necessary and that it will not incur any debt). These procedures are designed to ensure fairness, transparency and efficiency in the allocation of funds from the Fair Trade premium. One of the villages where I stayed had a borehole which had been provided by Kuapa Kokoo, but this had been installed prior to my arrival so I did not experience the process of obtaining it.

10. See <http://www.cadburyschweppes.com/EN/EnvironmentSociety/CaseStudies/BuildingWells.htm> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

11. The consumer testimonial in Goodman (2004, p. 900) is an example of this.

12. For reasons which cannot be expanded on in the present chapter, giving farmers ownership of a Western company making chocolate is more efficient and beneficial to them than setting up chocolate manufacturing facilities in Ghana.

13. See, for example, Daily Graphic (2001, January 16, 2001, September 17, 2001, October 5, 2001, December 28, 2002, October 12).

14. See <http://www.divinechocolate.com/about/story.aspx>

15. This issue has even received coverage in the UK media. See, for example: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2263247.stm> (last accessed 9th April 2008).

16. For further details see <http://www.divinechocolate.com/about/story.aspx>

17. At the time £1 was roughly 12,000 Ghanaian Cedis. The Ghanaian Cedi has since been re-denominated.

18. There are examples of such practices for other commodities. For example, Chalfin (2004) provides an interesting example of shea nut traders acting collectively to manipulate buyers in order to secure more favourable terms of trade.

19. By 1946, the Cocoa Marketing Board had amassed over £20 million. By 1951, this sum had reached almost £200 million (Foster, 1965, p. 179).

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